DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 165 342 EA 011 266

AUTHOR Nelson, Margaret
TITLE Looking Back at the First Year: A "Veteran" Principal's View. OSSC Bulletin Vol. 22, No. 6.
INSTITUTION Oregon School Study Council, Eugene.
PUB DATE Feb 79
NOTE 29p.
AVAILABLE FROM Oregon School Study Council, 124 College of Education, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403 ($2.00; $1.50 if prepaid; 10% discount for 10 or more copies)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Administration; Elementary Education; *Individual Development; Management; *Principals

ABSTRACT

The first year in the principal's chair is professionally challenging and a stimulus to growth, but it can also be a lonely, frustrating experience. Dr. Margaret Nelson, principal of Reedville Elementary School in Aloha, Oregon, relates her experiences as a first-year principal that could be useful to anyone either considering or entering the field of educational administration. She discusses her experiences and makes recommendations in the following areas: management, evaluation, grievances, open-door policies, interpersonal relations, discipline, testing, conferences, grades, budgeting, maintenance, faculty meetings and staff relations, the relationship of the principal to the children, and the relationship of the community and the school. Although directed to new principals, this bulletin could also be of interest to superintendents, school board members, or anyone else involved in public school governance. (Author/LD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED165342

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

OSSC
BULLETIN

LOOKING BACK AT THE FIRST YEAR: A "VETERAN" PRINCIPAL'S VIEW

by
Margaret Nelson
Principal
Reedville Elementary School
Aloha, Oregon

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

OSSC

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

Oregon School Study Council
Vol. 22, No. 5
February 1979

EA 011 266

OSSC BULLETIN

LOOKING BACK AT THE FIRST YEAR:

A "VETERAN" PRINCIPAL'S VIEW

by

Margaret Nelson

Principal

Reedville Elementary School

Aloha, Oregon

Individual copy--$2.00 ($1.50 if prepaid)

Discount of 10% for 10 or more copies

PREFACE

The first year in the principal's chair is professionally challenging and a stimulus to growth. It is also difficult, frustrating, lonely, and filled with unanticipated problems. Regardless of professional preparation, new principals will always benefit from practical suggestions by their peers and by their superiors for those unplanned situations bound to occur their first year as a new educational leader.

Dr. Margaret Nelson, Principal, Reedville Elementary School in Aloha, has addressed a number of these practical problems with good humor and common sense. Her Bulletin, Looking Back at the First Year: A "Veteran" Principal's View, will be useful to anyone either considering or entering the field of educational administration as a first-year principal. Her thoughts range from over-all management of the school to interpersonal relationships, budgeting and maintenance.

Although directed to new principals, Dr. Nelson's remarks also will be of interest to superintendents and school board members. Each of the practical issues addressed in this Bulletin has larger policy implications that concern everyone involved in public school governance.

Kenneth A. Erickson
Executive Secretary
Oregon School Study Council

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Management 1

Evaluation 3

Grievance 4

Open Door Policy 5

Interpersonal Relations 6

Discipline 8

The Principal and the "Kids" 11

Testing 12

Conferences 14

Grades 16

Budgeting 16

Maintenance 19

Faculty Meetings and Staff Relations 21

The Community and the School 23

LOOKING BACK AT THE FIRST YEAR: A "VETERAN" PRINCIPAL'S VIEW

This is not an article for long-experienced principals. If one should care to read it, chuckle and say, "Oh, I could have told you that!" It also may not be for those persons who are extremely well organized or in the bloom of youth. It will appeal more to those who occasionally suffer from the chicken-looking-for-its-head syndrome, or; have devoted years of their career lives to classroom teaching, or; who dislike taking advice from people who apparently never make mistakes and just write articles to make that clear. It is for those of you who are entering the exciting, exacting world of the principalship for the first time.

First, don't be deceived that vice-principal experience, or being a curriculum director, or a student-teacher supervisor, or a classroom teacher for decades prepares one as might be expected for this new role. Certainly, being a vice-principal establishes a strong base for a smoother discipline style. Curriculum experience enables one to more efficiently direct staff program efforts. And 20 plus years of classroom teaching definitely gives a principal at least a modicum of credibility in faculty's eyes.

Management

So what is the biggest problem facing us beginners? Management, that's what--good tight, systematic management. If you are like most,

the first year is a love affair; children, parents, staff, and you planning, projecting, learning and loving together. My awareness of a lack occurred when everyone but the custodians and I went home for the summer. That vague dissatisfaction about the techniques we had all been using to manage our school began taking a definite shape.

First example: I had just become the school secretary. First advice: either be efficient enough to get everything done before school is out, or arrange to have your secretary with you a minimum of two weeks after school closes. Verifying book orders, inventorying in-coming supplies, registering new arrivals, finalizing reports is doubly time consuming without office help.

Second tip: practice as much shared governance of your building as you comfortably can. The days of the principal as THE BOSS are fortunately numbered. Since I couldn't run the school singlehandedly, I asked for and took lots of advice from the folks who were helping. Naturally, there must be unilateral decisions, but many of those can at least be discussed. However, there are times that we must remember that we <u>are</u> "boses," and while we can be humble ones, we nevertheless are accountable. If we are fair, knowledgeable, helpful, and supportive while putting in the longer hours, going to the night meetings, cabinet meetings, taking the flak, then we should be able to bank the extra dollars with a clear conscience. The management aspect of shared governance simply involves <u>records</u> of suggestions, questions and discussions. A common problem with solutions by consensus is that some people are occasionally unaware or forgetful of the agreement. Documentation is a must.

Evaluation

Evaluation can be a potentially exciting and humanistic process. Involving staff in their own evaluations is not only helpful, but standard practice in many districts. Realistic goal setting, as well as judging on-going programs can often best be done by those closest to the process, the teachers. Of course, if a teacher and principal differ drastically on an item on the checklist, the teacher claiming to be "outstanding," and the principal rating him or her "needs improvement," then a conference is in order. However, most teachers, being human beings, know their shortcomings, and if the evaluating principal gives specific suggestions on how teacher improvement can occur, friction is reduced considerably. As an old hand in the teaching ranks, I can identify with unhappy teacher reaction to the short, cold statement on an evaluation form: "Mrs. X needs to . . ."

New principals should remember well that teaching is an emotion-packed, demanding job, and that the folks being evaluated are not there because they can't do anything else, regardless of the cliché to the contrary. Teachers have a commitment and they work hard. If they have not been very well trained in college, they need a principal who has been, both in the university and by experience. I have worked for principals who knew far less than I did about a lot of things, and I took not at all seriously the poorly-phrased evaluative statements, whether positive or negative. Principals owe staff proper evaluations: if good, why, and if poor, how to change. I would speculate that in this day of budget cuts, when the first thought that comes to mind for teachers and

community is "reduce administration," if the principal is really a leader and a helper, the staff just might go to bat for the position. The management angle? Again, records. Consistent forms, typed narratives, signed carbons of conference sheets.

A final thought on evaluations: principals should seek and not fear staff evaluations. The compliments are nice and the criticisms helpful. I will not ask for anonymous evaluations again! I need to talk with that one teacher who gave me a negative "lulu." Anyone who feels that strongly, and is keeping those feelings buried, is emotionally distraught and needs to surface the feelings to be able to function the way I want a teacher to function. Since principals agonize over proper wording and sign their improvement or dismissal evaluations of teachers, then teachers should be allowed that same grown-up privilege.

Grievance

A new principal faces GRIEVANCE! Scary word, isn't it? I work for a superintendent who says that if a principal doesn't get one per year, the job isn't being done right. While the philosophy is not mine, it's nice to have a support base to overcome the fear. My opinion is that this "fear" doesn't seem to be based on the outcome of a grievance, but on the ego-deflation involved. If we must go that far, if we've been fair and we've documented, the chances are that we will "win," though I hate the word. The point is, that if we are grieved, one of the two parties is wrong somehow. I think I've reached enough awareness of the

role that I can cope with this process, since the grievance would be brought as a result of the careful evaluation referred to earlier.

Precise record keeping as part of the evaluation process should not be done just because the specter of grievance may raise its ugly head, but just as good management. There were several times this year that a teacher and I needed to review a suggestion I'd given on an off-the-cuff basis that neither of us could precisely recall. My unique "notes-in-pockets" filing system led to frustration for both of us. While creative evaluation may be fine, sloppy paper work is self-defeating.

Open Door Policy

The open door policy is a marvelous, humanistic thing. It can also be an administrative time-robber. I scoffed when I first head this from Dr. Ken Erickson, University of Oregon . . . I would be able to do all my work between handling everyone else's problems. (I'm working during vacation this year to prove that I was right.)

Next year's plan includes some self discipline; at least one hour per day will be reserved for planning and reading, and I will forgo the pleasure of staff and children dropping in at all times. Staff may understand the door being closed for "conference," but not that it's legitimate for a good principal to be just sitting and thinking! I have fully experienced the worry that someone might think I am not WORKING if I am reviewing a reading text manual, or reading the latest article on P.L. 94-142. Much of a principal's reading time should be spent on becoming familiar with all the subject matter texts in the building. It's

difficult to evaluate a teacher on academic presentations if the evaluator is unfamiliar with the scope and sequence of district adoptions. While it is true that strategies and techniques are often the basis for evaluations, achievement tests measure knowledge, and the evaluator needs to know what is being presented.

Interpersonal Relations

Evaluation goes hand in hand with interpersonal relations (IPR), perhaps the most important part of our jobs, and like the open door policy, can overburden the principal with concentration on establishing rapport. I am not advising aloofness . . . I'd personally find it impossible, but I would advise those about to enter this adventure, particularly those who have recently come up from the teaching ranks, to remember at times that you have been hired to run a school, not a popularity contest. It is very hard to tell your close friends that lesson plans are not really well done or that their spelling or grammar in printed notices going home is inaccurate.

My staff is always pleased when I back them strongly in a conflict with students or parents. They are less pleased when I back the "other side." I understand that, but my goal as a principal is that when experience and education lead to constructive criticism, I can judge less emotionally and bleed inside less. The very term IPR does not preclude some negativism. Dealing with inappropriate teacher behavior unemotionally and politely is very difficult since there are so few evaluative facts in our field. Unless teachers are so blatantly and obviously behaving

unprofessionally, administrators pit opinions against theirs. We must be able to collect hard data in educationally acceptable forms. Whether we call constructive criticism evaluation or suggestions, the name of the game is improvement or maintenance of program and instruction; the interpersonal relations necessary to allow this process to occur will hopefully be positive. If relations are strained from time to time, so be it.

IPR with support staff, students, and parents follow the same rules. When possible, cheerfulness, understanding, tact, sympathy will stand us in good stead. When necessary, adherence to standards to keep a school functioning may meet with resistance and dismay . . . the former from other folks, the latter from the new administrator. Interestingly enough, a new principal often runs into resistance from support staff more than from certified teachers. Long-term custodians, cooks and secretaries usually have systems that have worked well for them, and they fear that a new administrator will change them. My feeling is that if those systems are good, it's best to leave them alone, but if, as in my case, the quality of work or the manner in which it is done is at odds with the principal's philosophy or standards, then good IPR can be achieved only after the principal adjusts the support system. Much delicacy and a measure of firmness should be part of the new principal's IPR bag when dealing with these indispensable people, for the school literally cannot function without them.

Discipline

Student behavior management should be the least of a good principal's worries. If morale is good, and children like to be at school, discipline is simple. If we've "survived" education enough years to become principals, and still get along well with children, we probably deserve to be principals. We do owe a lot of folks consistency . . . up to a point. Regardless of our great plans we may and should occasionally deviate from them. Instead of swats, we might have to let a 6th grader bawl on a shoulder. Ordinarily, however, the fewer the rules, the firmer it's possible to be. I have one major rule: No fighting. If two kids swing, no matter who swung first, both are punished. If one swings, and one reports, the case is assault, and one is punished. If both swing, the first swinger may receive a harsher sentence, but both pay.

(The first parent I dealt with who expounded the usual theory that his son had been raised to never hit first, but to always defend himself, presented a challenge to my logic. Upon reflection, however, I was able to persuade the father that crises in grade school that precipitate fighting are seldom life or death matters requiring self-defense. They are usually the result of quarrelling over a place in line or a playground ball, and, therefore, are simple infractions of the rule . . . which is, of course, no fighting.)

I borrowed a slick, systematic record-keeping system from a woman principal friend. Instead of the little, black book, we use a big, blue three-ring book. A student visiting the office for disciplinary reasons finds his or her name entered on a dated "offense" sheet, on which

principal action is also entered, and the sheet alphabetized. It's a "3 times and you're punished severely" system, which has been carefully explained to the student body earlier on. Rules and consequences are also mailed to parents with the first parent club mailing.

Parents appreciate hard data, and are usually supportive when precise and simplistic records show evidence that a paddling might be in order. In our school we do this under rather rigid conditions: (1) recipients are seldom above 2nd grade, (2) parents have always given permission, and (3) the recipient of the swats has demonstrated that learning through the seat of the pants is more effective than through the brain.

Children learn nothing sitting at home watching TV, or running the streets while busy parents are at work. This has caused our staff to think more than twice before recommending suspension. We have quite successfully used a modified in-school suspension. Chronic offenders at one grade level are removed from that peer group for up to one week. They continue their studies, the homeroom teacher providing work, and a receiving teacher at a different grade level overseeing it. Suspended students continue to go to recess, music, library, P.E., and lunch, but never with grade level buddies with whom they have had problems. Embarrassing? Perhaps, particularly to 6th graders in a first grade room. Effective? Yes, particularly for the just mentioned. First graders in a 6th grade room learn how to sit still very quickly. The student body has been well-trained never to be unkind, but to just ignore "visitors." Sympathizers are quickly chastised by teachers. Everyone seems to understand and accept the system, and parents are grateful that their unruly children are given the chance to stay in school.

Gum chewing (to be or not to be) may be the singlemost "ugly" a principal deals with. The spin-off implications and ramifications surrounding a rule implementation are staggering!

I refused to make an administrative ruling. I told my staff at the first inservice week faculty meeting that for over 20 years I had participated in faculty meetings where emotions had reached shouting and crying levels during discussions of the pros and cons of this social habit. I'd heard every conceivable opinion and was still as undecided as I'd ever been; therefore, the meeting would begin--I'd listen, but not participate. Whatever staff decided, I would enforce but if gum chewing were to be allowed, it would be under a set of conditions:

(1) If kids could chew gum in class it would be all classrooms. One of two teachers could not state, "I don't care what Mr. X lets you do, no gum in here!"

(2) The opposite: "I know you can't chew gum in Mr. X's room but you can in here."

(3) Absolutely no gum on the playground, in the cafeteria, in music, P.E. or library, for obvious reasons.

(4) If students broke the rules, a reasonable consequence which could be enforced (such as a one week moratorium on gum) would follow. If a single student was caught, the consequence would be individual; if gum was found on a cafeteria tray, on the floor, or in a water fountain, the student body would lose the privilege.

(5) We would not "advertise." We would all state that gum chewing

is not a moral issue, but a dental one, so while we didn't encourage it, we would not make an issue of it.

The staff agreed unanimously that a no-chew rule could not be enforced. Too much time and effort was spent by students and teachers trying to outguess one another, and the principal would get nothing else done! They agreed to the conditions. During the year we had numerous individual students lose a recess for bypassing the wastebasket on the way out the door, a week's moratorium for grades one and two because of gum on a tray used at their lunch period, and one total school loss of privilege when I stepped on a piece in the hall. That was it. (So far no parent objections; until then, we plan to use our system.)

The Principal and the "Kids"

Knowing lots about our children in our buildings can be accomplished in several nice ways. Playing with them at recess is an old standby. I have a guest table in the cafeteria and "entertain" about 8 children each day. A small group sometimes joins me for neighborhood walks at noon during which we chat with neighbors working outside. Because I feel it's so important to know each child by at least first name, I drop in rooms and play a timed game of learning names. Kids love to switch seats when I do this to check me out! Beginning at the door everyday at entering and dismissal times is amazingly rewarding. I learn about the lost teeth, new babies and puppies, troubles at bus stops, and receive "Very Good" papers and drawings to post on my office wall. I bought a polaroid camera

and keep a small bulletin board of pictures showing children "caught in the act of doing something good."

Winning children's trust allows for the necessary "spy" system every building needs. Building up their pride in their school through compliments and high expectations brings in the informants when vandalism is evident.

Testing

My staff surfaced a good question on testing this year: "What do administrators do with achievement test data?" Some were suspicious that principals weigh one class against the other, and judge teachers on the results. Others were quite sure that test results are put away in a closet, and that the whole thing has been an exercise in futility.

Both concerns are well worth looking into. If the principal has done the original grouping of students correctly (based on last year's tests), each class should have a balance of high to low achievers. (Incidentally, while secretaries can do this mechanical grouping, it behooves the principal to do it, so that she or he knows the makeup of the rooms in the school.) If we do our jobs right, perusal of classroom testing scores will indicate that regardless of IQ, or teacher placement, each child has grown some over the year. Therefore, a slow 5th grader achieving a 3rd grade score, but showing a gain since 4th grade is a reflection of good teaching, not poor. Conversely, a "normal" 5th grader showing no gain might be a warning to the principal that a teacher

might be lacking skills, but the child would not be the only one in the class, nor would a principal need to wait until testing time to be aware of such poor teaching.

As far as what principals do with data, they should certainly be examining programs based on that data. In our district, a particular reading series has been in use for three years. Our reading scores are accelerating. Our math adoption is new this year, and our scores dropped. Our spelling series has been used for many years, and our scores remain constant. As principal, I have three obvious goals: (1) maintain the reading program instruction, (2) examine the math program carefully with an eye to inservice since the texts themselves still look good, and (3) change from consumable to hard back tests in spelling, since the program has proven itself. The implementation of hard back books may reduce the workbook mentality, that is, if kids fill in lots of blanks, they learn to think in blanks.

The actual recording of testing scores is something each principal should examine, and standardize for the building, if necessary. Regardless of individual states' cum file form, most are inadequate, in that columns are neither wide enough nor numerous enough. By the time teachers have recorded willy-nilly in various spots, no serious data collector can make heads nor tails out of most cum cards. Since the purpose of the file is for teachers, year after year, to follow a student's progress through the grades (hopefully in the same school), it makes sense for a faculty to adopt a standard system they all understand. Naturally, tests alone are not the basis for grouping students. Teachers are the

best source for information on child/child or child/teacher personality conflicts, work habits, discipline needs, etc. A factor in grouping not often thought of, but strongly advocated by Dr. Robert Wininger, Portland State University, is the "weighted" pupil load. A teacher receiving a handicapped child (blind, deaf, retarded, disturbed) should simply have a smaller group. Dr. Wininger emphasizes that while state standards allow for this practice, logistics and habit often preclude its use.

I would make a small plea that new principals tackle testing pitfalls immediately. Inservice a staff to reduce their frustrations and disinterest in testing. Examine programs in the light of scores, not people. You will reduce tension, and increase understanding 100 fold. Once staff understands that testing can be meaningful, and that the principal does use the information in a non-judgmental fashion, and that record keeping must be helpful to colleagues, their enthusiasm increases for doing a proper job.

Conferences

When a teacher has a potentially hostile parent conference, I found it very wise to sit in. Just being an objective third party, as well as an authority figure is supportive of both parent and teacher. Group process skills are a must for a principal. Being able to mediate smoothly usually brings the conference to a successful end. If both parent and teacher have listened to each other, and said all that needs to be said, the child usually benefits. (I've told my teachers to never sit behind their desks when talking to parents--I do only if an issue has gone on

long enough that I've made an administrative decision that must be accepted, e.g., a suspension.)

If during a conference, it is obvious that the teacher is totally right, and the parent wrong, and both have been heard, the principal should draw the conference to a close as soon as possible, supporting and suggesting, and becoming involved in the implementation of the child's program. I found parents to be more trusting and amenable when I made the child accountable to me somehow (checking homework, listening to him read, getting reports from the bus driver). Being firm while polite with a hostile parent is an emotionally draining experience. Teachers may become emotional through frustration . . . the principal cannot.

Conversely, if a parent has a legitimate complaint, and the teacher little or no defense, a principal should never deny that teacher the privilege of receiving the anger. I try to keep those conferences very short, taking first control and stating to the teacher: "Mr. X tells me that . . . Would you explain briefly?" After the explanation (usually an apology), I have stated: "I can understand how you might have felt, but you and I must assure this parent that this won't occur again. I would like for you to hear how this parent has felt." The trick at this point is to allow the parental anger to spark and burn out quickly. Long diatribes gain no one anything. Walking the parent out then, and following up on shoring up the teacher's damaged feelings is the next vital key.

Grades

Grades are often a source of contention between parents and teachers. New principals should establish, at the beginning of the year, a policy that any grades less than "C" (or unsatisfactory) going home on a report card be brought to the principal's attention by midterm. Some teachers resent this intrusion into what they believe to be their professional judgment. I look at it as a protection for them. After all, the principal gets the call: "Why did my daughter get an F in science?" If I didn't know daughter did, if teacher didn't ask for help a month earlier, I can't help. I also look foolish not knowing help was needed by several people, and I don't like that!

Budgeting

Possibly the most horrendous undertaking the first year is a two part one: (1) administrating a budget not personally built, and (2) building one for the next year. (I have been fortunate because our district has a superb business manager whose patience and instruction accounted for my eventual interpretation of our own program budgeting.)

Accounts for textbooks and supplies are easy to establish. Ordinarily the sums are derived from a simple dollar cost per child. (Spending the money is trickier.) Accounts for repairs and maintenance, building and grounds, instructional and non-instructional equipment are often harder to anticipate. Large or routine expenditures (new roof, room painting, requests for teaching machines) are long-range, but

freezers and water heaters that break down mid-year, or the need for books and teachers due to increased enrollment in February are tough to plan for.

A textbook inventory set up in a check-out form and a central depository are indispensable. Since each level of math, spelling, and reading texts should be used at more than one grade level, book ordering at budget time is much easier if one knows not only how many books of a title are in the building, but where they are. Scanning individual room inventories to borrow or buy became a time-consuming hassle, so we went to a 4 x 6 card file in which each teacher initialed the card after checking out the number of books needed. We found that we didn't need to order so many since grade levels use the titles at varying times of the year. The system also allows for increased storage spaces in classrooms. If no central closet is available, each teacher can store a complete set over the summer and be responsible for checkout during the year. The cards, however, stay in the file.

Teacher requests for titles not "assigned" to their grade levels should be encouraged, in that commitment to teaching children where they are evident. Fortunately, many of the series now are numbered by levels (Holt Reading: 1-15), rather than as a 3^{1} or 4^{2} reader. Children and parents are beginning to understand better that a book is not intended to be used just in a grade, but for a child who needs the skills taught in that book.

Filling teacher requests for supplies is not just a nicety, but a financial necessity at budget time. Most school supply rooms show some

evidence of one-time unilateral administrative buying: mountains of construction paper of colors nobody ever uses, dozens of cans of little-used colors of paint, giant primary paint brushes better designed to paint houses. I gave each of my staff a large percentage of the dollars-per-child, children-per-room figure, and turned them loose with the catalogs. All ditto paper, masters, paint, marking pens, chalk, rulers, etc., were to be included in that order. Those who didn't need as much donated their extra allotment to a colleague. Additionally, each received a $25.00 account at a local educational-product store to be used by mid-November. This bought them little manipulative games, pretty calendars and extra personalized teaching devices they usually spend their own money for. The remainder of the supply money I kept for the unseen expenses during the year, particularly needs caused by increased enrollment. (One unseen, but not uncommon problem, is running out of ditto paper. This next year each teacher has ordered according to anticipated need and will keep ditto paper supplies separate from general office use. The teachers and I have discussed the PURPLE PLAGUE. Ordering heavier bond paper at pennies more per ream allows for back-to-back printing and reduces costs.)

I discovered a sad thing. Teachers were less enthusiastic than I had hoped when I gave them the ordering forms. They told me that they had filled in order blanks before, but usually did not receive what they had asked for. Supplies were often redistributed among schools, or put in the principal's office to be doled out. I had never experienced this as a teacher, and I was shocked to find that the practice is not uncommon. It should be! The gap between teachers and administrators is wide enough without nonsense about not trusting teachers to use what they need.

Maintenance

Establishing a long-range, systematic building management plan early in the year is essential: the roof this summer, the gym floor next summer, shelves for the cafeteria next winter vacation, three classrooms during spring break, etc. If the district has a custodial supervisor, he can help greatly by getting bids, ordering some supplies, discussing plans and making suggestions. His help is vital in drawing the summer work schedule since often times extra help is hired and he knows which tasks they can do. Teachers' written repair requests made and filed during the year, unless small enough to be handled immediately, should be prioritized and listed on the summer work plan.

The night custodian will follow a fairly consistent plan, and the principal obviously should know what it is. It is sometimes hard to make this clear to the person without his thinking the principal is critical, nosey, or both. But knowing which lights should be left on, how often areas are disinfected, mopped, or waxed, or any number of a myriad of things is essential.

To his surprise, I reduced the night man's work load when I examined his schedule in detail. So he could get some jobs done more thoroughly, I asked students and teachers to assume some duties (erasing chalkboards, emptying baskets, locking windows, putting up chairs, and vacuuming the reading area rugs).

While the day man's schedule must be more flexible (children throw up, lights burn out, the dishwasher breaks), the principal still needs to

be on top of the general duty-schedule. I realize that I sound somewhat adamant about support staff issues. As a teacher for many years, I spent my share of time visiting with custodians, cooks, and secretaries getting little favors done and occasionally hearing veiled (and sometimes open) criticisms of the principal. Until I became that person, I neither took the time to pay much attention nor to examine why these indispensable people are so often vaguely unhappy and resentful of the principal's authority.

I think I have some insights now. First, of course, is the daily exposure to the double standard pay scale, based on the two words "classified" and "certified." The lack of the college degree somehow seems to reduce the importance of their work, so they are labeled both semantically and financially. I know it costs a lot to get a college education; I also know I cannot cook for 300, fix the plumbing, install ballast for fluorescent lighting, or type, file, and keep accounts very well. Yet I am the "enforcer." I must often tell these folks when and sometimes how to do their jobs, for sadly, but understandably enough, if one's job is not well-considered, why spend too much time on it?

The second intuitive guess I'd make is that cooks and custodians particularly must come to feel that the building and its kitchen is their second "home." They clean and paint it, now its grounds, prepare meals and wash dishes in it. The rest of us are like guests who mess up the place! (I know how I feel when my mother comes to visit and suggests how I run my house!)

The school secretary is usually the first to get the irate call, the child bleeding from a playground accident, or the unthinking teacher who

wants "20 copies" immediately. Naturally, these crises occur at the time an attendance report is due in 30 minutes. The principal says, "Please type this letter immediately."

Yet, understanding is a two-way street. The principal is juggling these jobs and schedules with those of children, teachers, librarians, P.E. and music specialists, and bus drivers, but it's being done in such a complex manner, many people are unaware of the necessity of the knowing being part of the coordination. Being considerate is vital, but keeping the building running smoothly is also.

Faculty Meetings and Staff Relations

For years as a teacher I alternated between dreading and looking forward to regularly scheduled faculty meetings: the former because so often my boss would read an agenda so well prepared it was redundant in that it could have been a bulletin, or we as a staff would beat a topic that had been earlier discussed to death; the latter because an important issue needing discussion had been put off until a scheduled date.

As a new principal, I vowed we wouldn't do this. I would suggest to other new principals that faculty meetings be called by that person and/or any staff member who needs the group as a sounding board.

We established a policy of meeting when necessary. That may have been once every three months, or three times in one week. Except in emergencies, the rule was two days notice, taped to the mailbox board, and signed by the person calling the meeting. Individual staff members exercised this option three times during the year: the reading specialist to

discuss testing, the music teacher to plan the winter program, and the P.E. teacher to plan a field day. All meetings went from 8:10 a.m. to 8:40 a.m. when the children entered the building. An agenda was posted in advance, and staff was encouraged to add to it any topics needing discussion. If issues weren't settled, or we ran out of time, a meeting the next day was scheduled. Bulletins in lieu of meetings had to be signed and returned the day they were sent out. Teachers who claimed they were unaware of an announcement were shown their initials on the bulletin, and given little sympathy for an inconvenience.

Because of the brevity and good fellowship present at our faculty meetings, staff often jokingly referred to them as "the family meeting." The rapport built by the give and take of staff was beautiful to behold. Only once was a vote taken on an issue--that was at the first meeting, and it involved whether or not smoking would be permitted in the staff room. Since only two smoked, the principal and one teacher, the vote was negative. (I got to know that teacher very well in the boiler room!)

Arranging the lunch periods on 15 minute modules allows primary and upper grade staff to see one another. I firmly believe that the closeness that developed in our staff was due to this arrangement.

I laid down a ground rule early that I objected to faculty room gossip: i.e., selling kids down the river, "Susie is a mess," "You should have seen her brother last year!" "Wait until you get her sister next year!" Since my office opens onto the faculty room, it was easy to enforce this rule. Conversations involved professional and personal concerns, and folks got to know one another. Of course, I know when I wasn't

conspicuously eavesdropping, or joining the group, teacher organization issues and other matters were hotly discussed. That's fine, at least we raised our consciousness about gossip. We're generally pleased with ourselves.

The Community and the School

I've been fortunate in that I took over an old school with a HISTORY. One of the oldest buildings in the state, its days are numbered (maybe ten years) before it's condemned, or falls down. It's been added onto, remodeled, shored up, neglected, and loved. The lack of in-school vandalism has to do with staff's and my pride and interest in its historic value. Children have responded to our insistence on treating our school like a dear grandparent. It sits in the midst of a new community built upon the original surrounding fruit orchard lands. The young parents who have established homes look on their school as the focal point of the community. The gym (old, wood floor) is used seven days a week by key-carrying citizens representing sports and service-minded groups.

But a school need not be this old, nor have the nostalgic value to bring out the best in its community. Because we have not looked at its tax-paying clients as intruders in our educational halls, the local citizenry has passed bond issues, raised money for playground equipment, created a non-dues parent club, held neighbor picnics, and generally supported the school. To further foster this climate of acceptance and support, I have called one family per day to simply ask, "This is your school

calling. How do you feel we are doing?" Some answers have been hard to swallow, but most have been positive.

I have written this to encourage those entering this field to do so with humility and faith in your own expertise to carry on. We will always need good principals. Good luck!